

Interviews



Looking for a job is a full-time job. Many hours of work go into a successful job search campaign. The interview is a critical step toward the goal of employment. It is at the interview that the job is won or lost; it is where you “sell” your qualifications. The best test of any job search is the number of interviews you are offered. If you are consistently being interviewed, you should expect job offers. If you are not getting interviews, you need to reevaluate your job search strategy.

An employment interview is simply a meeting between you and a potential employer to discuss your qualifications and see if there is a “fit.” The employer wants to verify what they know about you and talk about your qualifications. If you have been called for an interview, you can assume that the employer is interested in you. The employer has a need that you may be able to meet. It is your goal to identify that need and convince the employer that you are the one for the job and that you can add value to their bottom line.

Interviews can be stressful, but when you are well prepared there is no reason to panic. An interview generally lasts from 30 to 60 minutes and most questions fall into standard categories.

Preparation

Preparation is the key to success in a calculated job search campaign. Preparation will help win the interview and will improve interview success. Begin by gathering all the information and documents you may need for the interview. Bring extra copies of your resume, a typed list of references and letter(s) of recommendation. You may also want

to bring school transcripts, licenses and certifications. Work samples are also powerful tools (e.g., designs, drawings, writings). Finally, bring a pen and pad of paper for taking notes.

The more you know about the job, the employer, and the industry, the better prepared you will be to target your qualifications. Up to this point you should have been gathering some of this information. Now is the time to intensify your research and expand your knowledge. There are many sources of information. Ask the employer for a position description. Research employer profiles at any Chamber of Commerce or local library. Network with anyone you know who works for the company or for a related company.

The next step is to match your qualifications to the requirements of the job. A good approach is to write out your qualifications along with the job requirements. Think about some standard interview questions and how you might respond. Most questions are designed to find out more about you, your qualifications, or to test your reactions in a given situation. If you lack experience or skills in a required area, think about how you might make up for those deficiencies.

The Interview

The purpose of an interview is to become acquainted and to learn about one another. The employer wants to learn how you “fit into the organization”,

Interview Tips

- Maintain good eye contact throughout the interview.
- Do not be a clock watcher.
- Do not discuss illegal or discriminatory subjects such as race, religion, age, national origin, equal rights or gender.
- Dress a step above what you would wear on the job.
- Be aware of nonverbal body language; do not:
 - put your hands in your pockets
 - chew a pencil or other object
 - clench or wring your hands
 - tap a pen or pencil
 - fiddle with jewelry
 - jingle keys or coins in your pocket

but it is also an opportunity for you to evaluate the company. Employers use a variety of interview formats. There are series of interviews, panel interviews, phone interviews, or the traditional one-on-one interviews. Sometimes staff from the personnel or human resource departments will conduct an initial screening and the hiring authority will conduct the actual interview.

During an interview it is important that you be yourself. It is advised that you get a good night's sleep and plan your travel to arrive in plenty of time. However, you should present yourself for the interview no more than 15 minutes early. While you are waiting for your interview, try getting to know the office staff through small talk. Any connections made here could be a plus when the final hiring decision is being made.

Interview Questions

The interview is a sales meeting and you are both the salesperson and the product. The basic question in every interview, whether it is asked or not, is "Why should I hire you?" All other questions center on this one issue. Basic interview questions can take a variety of forms. Generally, questions will ask about you, your qualifications, experience, skills and motivation. If you have prepared for the interview and are confident about your qualifications, none of these questions should be difficult.

Listen carefully to each question asked in the interview. Take your time in responding and make sure your answers are positive. Express a good attitude and show that you are willing to work, eager to learn, and are flexible. If you are unsure of a question, do not be afraid to ask for clarification. Sometimes a good strategy is to close a response with a question for the interviewer. If you have researched the company beforehand, you will be better informed and able to ask more in-depth questions.

Focus on your qualifications but also look for opportunities to personalize the interview. There is nothing wrong with injecting some personal insight into your life. However, do not get too personal or dwell too long on non-job related topics. Show your potential to the company. Support your answers with examples from your experience. Avoid "yes" or "no" responses to questions.

Use caution if you are questioned about your salary requirements. Try to avoid the question until you have been offered a job. If that isn't possible, turn the question back to the interviewer and ask what salary range the position falls in, or what others in similar positions are being paid.

The interview is not over when you are asked if you have any questions. Come prepared to ask a couple of specific questions that again show your knowledge and interest in the job. This is not the time to ask about pay or benefits.

Closing the Interview

Close the interview in the same friendly, positive manner in which you started. If you want the job—say so. Summarize your qualifications again before leaving. When the interview is over, leave promptly. Do not overstay your time.

After the Interview

You will learn from each interview and become more confident from the experience. Evaluate the success and failures by asking yourself these questions:

- What points did I make that seemed to interest the employer?
- Did I present my qualifications well? Did I overlook qualifications that were important for the job?
- Did I learn all I needed to know about the job?
- Did I talk too much? Too little?
- Was I too assertive? Not assertive enough?
- Was I dressed appropriately?
- Did I effectively close the interview?

Finally, write a "thank-you" note or letter to each person who took part in the interview. Thank the employer for their time, restate your interest and qualifications for the job, and remind them of your intent to follow-up. Mail the letter the day of the interview.

Always continue to follow-up on the original position, or others that might be available. Being invited to be interviewed means you are high on the potential list. If you tweak your resume, streamline your job search and strengthen your interviewing skills, you could be #1 on the list next time.

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